

Perspectives from Several Continents

by Barbara Beaumont

In March of 2020, most Americans' lives came to a screeching halt. The virus that we'd heard was killing people in China suddenly came to our attention as we learned that it had arrived here. I was proud to be a Californian when Governor Newsom was the first to order a lockdown, yet we all assumed it would be short term. Little did we know of all the problems we would have.

First, there was the chronic underfunding of public health in the country, which meant that we were starting from behind. There was the fact that "an estimated 5.4 million American workers lost their health insurance between February and May, according to a new study" (Time magazine). Then there was a complete lack of national strategy on how to deal with the virus. Sadly, the U.S. disbanded its pandemic response unit in 2018. It would have helped.

The need to convince everyone to wear a mask outside of their home suffered a blow when our President refused to wear one and indicated that he thinks masks are for wimps, and a sign of weakness.

It's interesting that in East Asian countries people always wear masks if they have a cold or respiratory illness – to protect others. In fact, Hong Kong had huge success because 97 percent of Hong

Kong residents wore them. (The city gave them away for free.) Hong Kong closed their Disneyland in response to 52 new cases; in Orlando where there are many more cases, Disneyland is open.

That makes me think of Western European countries (such as the one I lived in) where people are used to taking directions from the government – in return for all the benefits they gain. Some did better than others, but all did better than we have done to date. Of course, they all have universal health care.

In Asia, where education is highly emphasized, they counted on expertise to tell them how to deal with this. (The vice president of Taiwan happened to be an epidemiologist.) They did very well. Early intervention and quarantines were the key, along with rules for social distancing.

The countries that have done the worst (ours included) relied on gut instinct. We created a panel of experts to advise us and then began to criticize them. We waited far too long to inform the public, and when we did there were many mixed messages. Rules vary from state to state and there is no clear Federal response.

It looks like we will be living with the virus for a long time.

There was chronic underfunding of public health in this country.

Based on Asia, early intervention is the key — so are painstaking tracking, enforced quarantines and meticulous social distancing — all coordinated by a leadership willing to act fast and be transparent.

The Author. Barbara Beaumont has returned to San Diego after 17 years living in the south of France. She is a graduate of the College of William and Mary in Virginia where she majored in sociology and then did graduate work at the University of Hawaii. She earned the credential to teach ESL at UC San Diego. In France she taught English for the Court of Appeals in Aix-en-Provence, with private students and in several companies. She most recently worked with foreign students at UC San Diego.

The essay above was sent to SDIS in August of 2020.

Reprinted from *COVID-19: getting through with wit and grit*, published by the San Diego Independent Scholars. (<https://sdscholars.org>) © Barbara Beaumont